

Mass Halo

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Summary: It's been ten years since the war ended and not much in my situation has changed. I'm in a strange place, not knowing much but self defence, death, and destruction. Just like old times. Mass Effect and Halo crossover. Scraped. I might reboot this, might not.

1. Prologue

It's been ten years since the war ended and not much in my situation has changed. I'm in a strange place, not knowing much but self-defense, death, and destruction. Just like old times.

I'm getting ahead of myself. My name is Nick. I'm a SPARTAN II. SPARTAN-137. Grew up with the heroes of the war, heroes like the Chief, like Fred, Linda, and Kelly. I'm one of the last SPARTAN IIs left after the war. Sure there are the IVs, but it's not the same. It wasn't really the same with the IIIs like Six ether, but it was closer. The IVs are mostly all volunteers now, the best of the applicants that ONI got. The SPARTANS aren't really SPARTANS anymore, mostly just used for peace-keeping or security for UNSC sponsored scavenger crews, looking for Covenant or Forerunner tech. Most of the time, things were uneventful on these voyages, but every once in a while, someone would find a habitable planet or, even more rarely, a forgotten Forerunner cache of new technology. Most of the time, the caches were nothing more than a few old pieces of tech the covenant passed over, but sometimes it would be a terminal, coded for humans' genetic structure. These terminals usually contained valuable blueprints or plans.

These plans have advanced the technology level of humans over 20 years ahead of what it was at the end of the war. Humanity's AI technology has advanced the most. Our AI technology then is considered expensive and inefficient by Forerunner standards. The basis of it is the same, mapping electric impulses as they moved through the brain, but we were doing it wrong. Instead of a recently

deceased specimen, the Forerunners found it easier to use a living brain, similar to what was done with a clone of Dr. Halsey's brain to create Cortana. With a few minor hardware tweaks and a new base, the first of the sixth generation of smart AIs was born.

There were also some other technological advancements, such as improved energy shielding and more compact hologram technology. We have also found a way to re-charge covenant energy-based weaponry, partly thanks to the Elites, our allies since the end of the war. They shared their plasma weaponry and slip-space drive with us, but so far all we have been able to do in the year since they did this was be able to reproduce them, and even that was a stretch.

I was assigned to a scavenger frigate, the Autumn's Light, as the chief Security Officer, but as a Sergeant Major, I still lead a small ground crew of about six marines. We didn't usually see much action on a scavenger voyage; mostly we just did the recon, providing protection groundside if needed. It was a fairly routine trip, for a while anyway.

* * *

><p>I groaned as I pulled myself out of the cryotube. Ten years of advancement and they still can't make the nutrient paste taste like anything but crap. As I put on clothes, I wondered why they won't let me wear my MJOLNIR armor in cryosleep. It's not like I haven't done it before. If the ship was attacked and I had to try to repel boarding parties, would you want a SPARTAN without his armor, armed only with a pistol and whatever weapons he's scavenged, or would you want him in full armor, where he'd have the advantage if something up to the size of a Hunter attacked?<p>

As I walked through the halls of the ship to get to my quarters, where I stored my weapons and armor, I passed several crewmen, to whom I gave a slight nod as I passed. They seemed interested in seeing a SPARTAN without his helmet, but there wasn't much to see. I had short black hair, dark brown eyes, and a small scar cutting into the corner of my upper lip. Other than that I was completely unremarkable. Unlike some of the others, such as Fred, who got silver streaks in his hair after the augmentations, the augmentations didn't really change my facial features much. All they did was make my face appear leaner, more angular than before.

As I walked into my quarters, I was greeted by the sight of my MJOLNIR armor on its stand, its small gold visor of my Recon helmet not quite matching with the white and dark grey of the rest of my Mark VII armor. The Mark VII improved on the old Mark VI armor. With a larger biofoam capacity, improved armor and shields, and a higher power microfusion reactor, allowing for longer uses of armor abilities, the armor was far superior to the older versions.

Being one of the last, if not the last, active SPARTAN IIs in the field gave me some perks. The gauntlets of the armor, colored a light silvery color, had new technology in them. The left had a hologram projector installed, and the right had a scavenged Forerunner charger capable of charging many items, including the weapons that the Covenant used. Both slimmed down as much as possible, highly experimental, highly expensive. They worked out most of the bugs, but there are still a few here or there.

To help me work out most of the bugs still remaining, as well as helping me with almost anything else I may need. As the most effective, as well as one of the most expensive (passed only by the Spartan Laser, and possibly the M808 Main Battle Tank), ONI decided to invest just a little more in their #1 "product" a couple of years ago, giving me the single most advanced piece of hardware in their hands: Korina.

Korina is a seventh gen. smart AI, and already at seven and a half years old, she has already passed the lifespan of the old AIs. She is as stable as when she was first created, and shows none of the signs of destabilization the old AIs used to show, even at only 1 year after activation. Her avatar, colored a dark shade of yellow, is of a young woman, wearing a long sleeve tee-shirt and a pair of jeans.

Almost as if knowing that I was thinking about her, her hologram appeared above the projector terminal in my room. "Oh, you're up," she said in her usual upbeat, perky voice. "It's been a month since you were put in cryo. I made sure no one messed with your private armory. Oh, and the captain wanted to see you."

"Hi Korina, nice to see you too," I muttered almost sarcastically as I walked up to my armor. "Yeah, I'm sure you did. Just give me a minute to get suited up."

I quietly put on my armor and cracked open the two crates in the corner of my room. Inside the crates, there was a wide array of weaponry, almost everything from the M6D Pistol to the M41 Rocket Launcher. I even had a few Covenant weapons, including an old Plasma Repeater from Reach. Given a spot of honor, was an Energy Sword. I stole it from an Elite back on Reach, and kept it with me, even after it lost its charge. It was one of the few things I had from Reach and Noble Team, the others being the repeater and Six's and Jorge's tags joining my own around my neck.

After that moment of contemplation for those lost, I decided and chose weapons from the box. First off I chose the 99D-S2 AM Sniper Rifle. It complemented the Active Camo armor ability I had installed, along with Armor Lock. The Mark VII had two slots for abilities, due to the increased reactor output. There were still some bugs with running two at once though. Next, I picked up the Plasma Repeater, as it was more effective than the MA5C due to only needing to be recharged, eliminating the need for ammo, and the fact that it didn't shut down from overheating. I then attached the M6D Pistol to the hip mag-strips and the Energy Sword to my belt. There were more mag-strips on the back than the Mark VI, allowing both the 99D-S2 and the repeater to be stored there at the same time.

With that sorted out, I was almost ready to see the captain. Once I got to the hologram podium, I pulled out Korina's chip and stuck it in the slot in the back of my helmet. Almost immediately, I felt the ice water-like feeling in the back of my mind. "Ah, that's better. There's much more space in the armor than that little pedestal."

I walked out of my room and started on my way to the bridge.

"Glad to hear you're comfortable. So, what's next? Off to see the captain?"

"Yup. He said there was something that you would want to know. Whatever it was, it didn't sound good."

I stopped in the hallway as soon as I heard that last bit. "Is itâ€| them?"

"I don't know, but I hope not."

2. Chapter 1

The halls of the Autumn's Light were almost empty, the marines in the mess, eating a last meal before the op. The crew was going about their duties; it was the middle of the shift. The scavenger crew, composed mostly of civilians, was prepping their equipment in the cargo bay. The elevator passed through the ship slowly, steadily bringing me to my destination.

The bridge of a Charon-Class light frigate wasn't all that big. It had four consoles, Weapons, Operations, Navigation, and Communication. The consoles were spread in a loose semi-circle around the central viewport, a large curved glass-like panel that also doubled as a computer overlay. It was certainly big enough for both. The command chair, with a built in consul, was not far behind the consuls.

The captain of the ship, Captain Cutler, was other UNSC personnel, along with me and the battalion of marines on board. When I walked in, he was standing behind the command chair looking out the viewport, his back to me.

"Reporting as ordered, sir!" As I said this I snapped to attention, saluting the officer. Years of training did not go away easily.

The captain turned to face me. "Ah, Sergeant Major. We have picked up something on the long-range scanners that we think might change your recon mission today to one of a more... aggressive mindset. Ensign, on the main screen, please."

I stared in dread as an all too familiar bulbous silhouette came up on the screen. "The Covenant? What are they doing here?"

"The Elites have spies within the Covenant, Grunts and Hunters loyal to them after the schism, relaying them information about troop movements and patrols, as well as other stuff like that. Some of their informants tipped them off that the Covenant found an old Forerunner research facility on an unexplored planet in a far off system. When they learned the specifics, they gave the info to the UNSC knowing that we will be able to obtain more information from the ruins then they will. Their only condition was that we share the technology we salvaged with them. As we were the closest ship to the system, and we were already on salvage duty, we were re-directed here. The only reason that we got here in time to stop them was because we were so close, and even then the beat us by a little. They have already sent retrieval crews down, but if we act fast, we may be able to deny them the Forerunner technology and retrieve it for ourselves. I need you to make your way to the complex, and hold them off until we can get the salvage crews ready. The main body of the marines will be engaging the forces as a distraction, and regroup with you after the salvage crews have landed. You will be inserted in

HEV pods with three ODS'Ts. The meteor storm currently over your LV will help hide the pods. Any questions?"

"Sir! No sir!"

"Good. You have twenty minutes. I suggest you meet with Sergeant Major Stoner to co-ordinate your operations. He has already received orders. Dismissed."

With that, I turned on my heels and walked out of the bridge. I made my way down to the galley to meet with the marines on this ship. They would be down there getting a last meal in before insertion. I was in luck, I had worked with Stoner before, so I knew he had my back, even if he was a little easy on his men.

When I got down there, Stoner was waiting for me at a table. I sat down, and we started planning the mission.

"Attention ground teams: Ten minutes until insertion. Ten minutes until insertion." The PA squawked at us, and having finished our planning, we stood up with all the other marines. "You gonna do the Johnson, or will I?"

"Honor's all yours, SPARTAN."

I stood out in front of the troops, took a breath, and began. "Marines, I'm not gonna lie to you. There's a ship's worth of Covie troops down there. The big man wants us to go down there, throw 'em a party, and see if we can sneak in a few uninvited guests. These "guests" are gonna take all their fancy stuff, even the pencil sharpener. We gotta cover for them if they get caught. Worse case, deny the Covies anything. I don't care if they don't want anything but the pencil sharpener back. Are we gonna let them have it?"

"Sir! No sir!"

"Good! Now let's do this thing! Oo-rah!"

"Oo-rah!"

I stepped aside to let the troops by to get to the drop ships, and made my way to the bottom of the ship, where I knew one of four HEVs had my number on it.

"Nice speech. You sounded just like him. Based on the records I have on him, of course." Korina seemed almost apologetic. "I knew you two were close."

"Yeah, we were." Although I didn't serve that long with Johnson, he made quite the impression. That tends to happen when you go through hell and back with someone. That was sort of what happened between the UNSC and the Elites. We went through so much together, simultaneously stopping two threats to the entire galaxy, an omniscidal maniac and a vicious parasite, that it sort of made up for the fact that they were sworn to drive us to extinction. In fact, we were working together to develop ways to restore glassed planets.

The end of my walk brought me out of my thoughts.

3. Chapter 2

I stopped just inside the drop hall. The long hallway, running along the bottom most section of the ship, was flanked on both sides by a row of HEV pods, each with a hatch underneath. I was met by three ODSs inside. The one who looked like the leader of the three, had a red stripe down his armor, and a playing card attached to his left shoulder. It looked like a three of hearts. The next one had basic armor, colored a dark blue, a bit bulkier than before due to the addition of an energy shield. The last one, a deep purple color, had attachments that looked fitting for a sniper. The red one stepped forward

"So you're the SPARTAN the captain is sending with us. Hope you're up to a long range orbital insertion. Name's Duke. The blue one over there, our demolitions guy, is Leroy. Purple one's Geoff. You know what the plan is, SPARTAN?"

"Yeah. We drop, make our way to some ruins, hold off the Covies until the reclaimer teams make it there, and protect them while they steal anything they can get their hands on."

"Good. Just checking. Can't be sure with those just outta the freezer. I suggest you strap up in your pod, we're dropping in three. In case you couldn't tell, your pod's one of the bigger ones."

"Thanks." I approached the larger pods, stashing my gear inside to one with the lights on inside, ignoring the ODSs. I knew they didn't like us. I think it had something to do with the ODSs John took out right after our augmentations. I was still unconscious; they really took a toll on me. Not as bad as Kelly, but still.

As I hauled myself into the pod, I felt a little apprehension. I haven't experienced an orbital insertion since training, and I was a little nervous. I didn't show it, but I think the ODSs could tell, judging by the way they were looking at me. They hauled themselves into their pods, all of us waiting for the drop.

"Dropping in three. Two. One. Drop."

Time slowed down. I always had the fastest reflexes of the SPARTANS. When my adrenalin got running, I was untouchable. Faster than even Kelly, but not for long. The fall to the surface took what seemed to be forever. I couldn't tell if it took 30 seconds or 30 days. I absolutely loved it. Best way to get groundside. Fastest too.

When the pod finally slammed down, I took a few deep breaths to calm myself before grabbing the repeater and climbing out. Coast is clear. I reached back and grabbed the sniper from the pod, and waited for the ODSs to climb out and grab their gear. "Everyone set?"

"Yeah SPARTAN. Let's go."

The ruins weren't that far away. Only about two k. Most of it was through a swamp probably around since the ruins were first built. Just my luck. As we trudged our way through the swamp, I observed the ODSs. They looked like they were veterans, but it was hard to tell. They seemed combat ready though. The last stretch of the route

brought us to a small ridge overlooking the entry way to the ruins.

The ruins were not forerunner. There was something distinctly different about the architectural style. They were just not forerunner. That was the only way I could describe them. Outside the large sealed metal door, there were a couple of Brutes and half a dozen Grunts. I signaled for Geoff to come up with me on the ridge. I pulled off my sniper, and told Geoff "You get the one on the right on my mark."

We set up, and I sighted my target, watching for any sign of movement. "Ready? Three. Two. One. Mark." On "mark" we both pulled the triggers, sending the two brutes to bloody heaps on the ground. The Grunts seemed confused for a second, searching for where the shots came from. The ODSTs and I charged down the ridge, easily overwhelming the Covie troops. Once they were taken care of, and the Brutes given brutal stomps to make sure they were down, we turned our attention to the door.

"Korina, can you do anything about that door?"

"I don't think so. It looks like they fried the door controls out here. A simple circuit with an open button. No electronics. Sorry, Nick."

"Okay, so we have to do this the loud way then. Leroy, what explosive do you have?"

"Jus' enoff ta send tis place inta orbit three times over," He replied in a southern drawl.

"Good. Don't think we need that much right now, but let's call that Plan B. Just use enough to "open" that door."

As he got to work on placing C-12 at the base of the large triangular door, I stood watching.

After about a minute, Leroy stood up again "I suggest we step back a bit. It's gonna blow big."

After we got back a safe distance, Leroy picked up the detonator. "In three. Two. One. Boom!"

Anything that might have followed would have been drowned out by the explosion. It left even my ears ringing in my soundproof helmet. When they stopped, I could hear Leroy saying "Think we knocked loud enoff, sir?"

Duke choked back a laugh. "That was one hell of a knock, man. Looks like they opened the door for us too."

I stepped in "Let's thank them on the way in. Anyway, we should probably go inside before we get left out in the rain." With that, we moved inside.

Once inside, we found ourselves in a long hallway. The door on the other side was smaller than the doorway we walked through, but that was to be expected when said doorway is ten feet tall. In the middle of the hallway was a lone Grunt, most likely investigating the big

bang. He seemed surprised to see us. I wonder why.

"Hey, sorry about the door."

"The Demon! The Demon is here! We're all doomed!" the Grunt, recognizing me, turned and started to run while flailing his arms. He was rewarded for his recognition of my skills with a methane explosion originating from his back.

"Yup, you are."

4. Chapter 3

Duke, Leroy, Geoff, and I stood outside the door the Grunt came out of. It looked like the Covies were getting sloppy, the door was unlocked. "You got a plan, SPARTAN?" Duke looked at me, almost mocking me with the way he asked.

"Yeah. We open the door, kill all of the Covies, and find the artifact. "

"I meant how to kill the Covies."

"I know. It won't be too hard."

"Whatever. Let's just open the door. I hope your confidence is justified."

As he said that, I turned to the door. Like the architecture, the panel was distinctly not Forerunner. Different symbols, different styles. But, strangely, like with the Forerunner symbols, something about them seemed familiar. "Korina, can you recognize these symbols?"

"No. They don't match anything humanity has seen before. Or at least recorded. Do you think you can open it?"

"Yeah, I think so. I'm getting that weird feeling again. Just like when I first came across the Forerunner glyphs." After that, I pressed the button, the one that just felt right. That's the only way I could describe how I knew which one; it just felt right.

Once I pressed it, something somewhere began making an ominous rumbling sound. Then the door started to slowly slide upward. Once it was done, a Brute turned around, probably thinking I was the Grunt we just killed. That was probably the only reason that he didn't open fire the second he saw me and the ODSs standing in the doorway. "The Demon? The Demon is here with three Imps!"

There were three Brutes, not including the one that was shot in the throat by Geoff. They didn't put up too much of a fight. The Grunts went down in a hail of lead from Duke, while the Brutes were taken care of by the rest of us.

Once they were dead, I walked towards what looked like the main control panel. It was similar to the door controls, solid buttons with fixed symbols instead of the holographic controls the Forerunners seemed to use. Between the buttons and the holographic display, I noticed a series of slots. One of them looked like it

would fit the chip in the back of my head.

"Ready?" I asked.

"Yup. Yank me."

With her consent, I pulled the chip housing Korina out of my head and stuck it into the slot. Almost immediately she popped up on one of the displays.

"Now that I'm in here, you can send the call. The time it will take them to get here will give me enough time to search the database, try to figure out what kind of species we're dealing with here. In the meantime, I suggest you close and lock the door, so the Covenant can't get in. There seems to be a scanning and monitor system outside. I'll see if I can activate it. If I can, the door should be able to open for the crew even though you locked it."

"Good. That means we can go deeper inside when you're done here. Hey, Duke, can you call the captain? I'm gonna look around a bit."

"Whatever SPARTAN. We all know that you're just too lazy to do it yourself."

I ignored him, and he went off into the corner to call the captain. Leroy and Geoff were looking at some control panels, trying to figure out what they did. Since they were occupied, I walked over to the center of the room to figure out what the large object was. While I was walking away from the master control panel, Duke finished his call and joined the two other ODSTs at the other panel, looking over the translating tablet they connected to the terminal.

The object I was looking at sort of reminded me of an energy sword. There was a large circle base at the bottom, with two prongs sticking straight up. The prongs were a dark silverish color. In the middle of the circle was a sphere of some kind of energy, or something, glowing a whiteish blue. Spinning around the sphere in the center were two small rings. The rings probably generated some kind of containment field, keeping the energy or whatever it was inside the rings. This thing seemed like nothing I have ever seen, further cementing the idea that this was made by some other alien race, not the Forerunners.

"Uh, Nick, you might want to come see this." Korina's voice startled me out of my contemplation of the artifact. She seemed almost awed, urgent even. "What is it?"

"I can't explain. It just ... Something you need to see to believe. Something that changes everything we know about ourselves and the galaxy. Trust me."

"Alright, fine. You download a copy of everything?"

"Yes. Plug me back in and I'll overlay the info over your HUD."

With the end of the conversation, I walked back to the console and unplugged the chip, sliding it back into the slot at the base of my skull. Just as it slid back in, the door opposite the one we came in slid open. The pack of Brutes and the several Grunts seemed as

surprised as I was. With a quick look at the pile of dead Brutes in the corner, they quickly made up their mind on their next course of action, and charged into the room.

As I killed the Grunts with my pistol before the Brutes could get too far, I saw the ODSTs leap over them console and use it as cover. It was only a second later when, with an empty clip and 12 Grunts dead on the floor, when I vaulted over the console and Geoff leaned out, taking down the rest of the Grunts. There were eight Brutes in all, most of them fairly high ranking, with the pack leader better protected with better armor. The normal Brutes didn't go down with too much of a fight, only a little dodging of a couple Brute shots.

The Chieftain, however, was already ant the ODSTs position before I could stop him. He activated his invincibility and charged over the console. Duke and Geoff managed to get out in time, but Leroy got clipped by the Gravity Hammer, and got sent flying across the room into the wall with a sickening crunch. "No time to check up on him now. Focus on the Chieftain!"

"I know, Korina. Can you let me focus please?"

"Right. Sorry."

I managed to draw the Chieftain's attention away from Duke and Geoff, but the plasma repeater in my hands did little against his invincibility. It seemed to be lasting longer than the usual ten seconds. I tried to lead him away from the ODSTs, giving them some time to check up on Leroy.

Duck and weave was the only thing going through my head. Somehow, we managed to work our way to the center of the room. Just then, his invincibility ran out. With the next swing, I duck under his hammer and pulled out my knife. With his back to me I used this to my advantage and stuck my knife into his neck and brought him down. Only as he fell to the ground did I realize that his hammer hit the object in the middle of the room.

"Do you have any info on what that thing is, Korina?"

"It was some sort of experimental way of transportation. It never got finished or tested."

"Did they have any info on what would happen if it got hit by a gravity hammer?"

"Really?"

"It was worth a try."

And with that, the transportation device exploded sending me flying toward the wall. A second before I hit, it all went dark.

* * *

><p>Sorry about the delay, I hope it will not happen again. Also, in hindsight, I realize I may have judged this story too harshly, so I'm changing the rating down to "T". If anyone has any complaints about this, let me know now or in the future.<p>

5. Chapter 4

As I came to, I realized I was face down on the ground. Then I realized it was not the smooth, cool metal of the ancient ruins, but dirt. I sat up with a groan. "How long was I out?"

"About 15 minutes. We were in some sort of slipspace portal for most of that time."

"What do you mean, 'slipspace portal'? Are you saying we're somewhere else?"

"As far as I can tell, yes. It might help me try to find out where we are if you look up. You know, so I can see the stars?"

"Right." I got up to my feet and looked up at the sky. "You getting a reading of the stars?"

"Barely. They aren't noticeable to the human eye, but the sensors can just barely detect them. Just keep looking at the sky till I give the word. I need to compare the constellations with those from the database."

The sky was a deep red-orange color, but I had trouble deciding if that was because of the time, the color of the atmosphere, or because of a large explosion or fire. The last one seemed the most likely, as there was what seemed to be ash gently falling from the sky. The fire, if there was one, hadn't gotten here yet, as the vegetation was still a bright and vibrant green.

"You can look back down now. I've compared the constellations with the charts, and as far as I can tell, we're completely lost in uncharted space."

"Great," I groaned, my voice dripping with sarcasm. "How about we take a quick look around. There has to be some better shelter than this cliff we're on."

"Yes, that would probably be good. Just be careful, we don't know what could be out there."

Now that I had a semblance of a plan, I took inventory. I still had my sniper rifle, as well as my pistol and energy sword. I would have liked an automatic weapon, but I could be in a worse situation. I looked down at my right arm. The Forerunner device on it was still glowing softly, gradually growing dimmer. As far as I could tell, it was undamaged, but I can't be sure, as much of its functions are still unknown. I just know that it will charge my sword. That will have to be good enough for now. Ability wise, the armor lock and active camo functions seemed fine.

I looked around one more time. I was standing on a cliff, with a path leading away, through a small canyon. It disappeared around a curve by a small pond not too far ahead. I looked over the cliff, and saw the ground too far down for me to be tempted to try to climb down it right now. I could see buildings in the distance, meaning this planet is occupied, or once was. I just hope the locals are friendly.

With everything all set, I set out down the canyon, sword in my right hand, pistol in my left. I wanted to use the sniper rounds only if I needed them, as I had less ammo for that than my pistol.

As I rounded the curve, I saw a lot of rough rocks, some standing vertically, some laying horizontally. I briefly wondered if this was some sort of burial ground, but then realized that the stones were too uneven, to randomly placed to be a burial ground. It should have been planned out, to maximize the amount of space.

I saw a body on the ground, in armor. As I got closer, I realized it was a human. I flipped the corpse over and found that it defiantly was a human male, and certainly dead. I looked for tags, but he wasn't wearing any, meaning that someone had probably taken them. We were not alone.

"Something's off about this Korina. If you can't place where we are, than how did this human corpse get here?"

"I have to agree Nick, something is off. Look at the holes in his armour. They're too small to be bullet holes. Something else killed this man, and recently too. The blood hasn't dried yet."

I saw a gun near his corpse, maybe an assault rifle. I checked the corpse for extra mags, but I couldn't find any. I picked up the gun anyway, as if there were more human troops in the area, they could always give me some spare ammo.

I continued on again, rising a small hill, coming to another corner. I could see what looked like a toolbox, but it was empty. More signs of life.

Around the corner were some weird trees, with large outcroppings. Up ahead was a large, low stone, one that looked like a good piece of cover. Beyond it was a small valley with more stones. At the far end was some odd metal contraption. I got closer to look at it, but almost immediately regretted it.

It was a large tripod, with a sinister spike on top. Impaled on the spike was a form that immediately filled me with dread. I could only describe it as a mechanical human Flood form. There were cables visible underneath whatever passed as it's skin, and creepy blue lights made to look somewhat like a human face in agony. There were two more of these.

Just then, they started moving. The spike was starting to withdraw from their bodies, and I started backing up, half expecting a flood of mechanical infection forms to start skittering down the sides of the canyon. When the Flood-mechs rose from the tripods, I could see no holes in their bodies from the spikes. The next second, they charged me. Keeping an eye on my motion tracker for more of these monsters, I engaged them with the sword. Luckily, they seemed quite stupid, almost happily charging into my reach, oblivious to the sword about to kill them. As a precautionary measure, I made sure to hack them to pieces, even though I couldn't see a single infection form.

"Well now," Korina started once I had calmed down. "That was ... unexpected."

"I hate the Flood," was all the response she got.

"I don't think that was the Flood. Too mechanical. Plus, we didn't see a single infection form. Very unlike the Flood, at least according to records."

"Still." And with that, I continued forwards. "I just hope those were not the other troops."

I came across a large circle in the earth, one that looked like ancient ruins. Someone must have excavated it. Just as I was about to say something about it to Korina, a gunshot, slightly faint, rang out clearly from somewhere up the hill in front of me.

"That might have just been the friends of our corpse," Korina said, very matter-of-factly.

I shot back with, "Or his killers."

Up the hill was a small encampment with what looked like a couple of mobile housing units, as well as more of the tripods. After making sure the tripods were empty and hacking apart the twisted mechanical bodies, I continued on, and heard what sounded like the end of a firefight. I waited a minute before coming around the corner, just to be cautious. Down a slope there was what appeared to be a loading dock for a mag-train. Lacking anything better to do, and looking for the participants of the firefight, I climbed down to the spaceport.

As I was coming closer, I could hear the end of the conversation. After a few small steps, the people talking came into view. On one side, there was a man hiding behind a bunch of boxes. On the other, there was three humans, all in armor. Two men and one woman, with the men in armor similar to the corpse, though one had a red stripe on his helmet and down his right arm. The woman was dressed in a heavier looking armor colored pink with white trim. There was a dead alien at their feet. Their conversation done, they turned and saw me, immediately pointing their guns at me.

* * *

><p>Note: Now seems like a good idea to explain a new detail i'm adding this chapter. Polls. On certain decisions, such as the major Paragon or Renegade choices, I will post a small poll at the end of the chapter. To respond, just put your vote in a review, or whatever you want to call it. The polls will last one week from the time of posting, at wich time i will announce the winner in an edit. Just note that not all of the poll results will be use in the story, I may be only curious about your opinion and have a definite direction I wish the story to go. Anyway, on to the first poll.<p>

****What background does Shephard have?****

This one will be irregular, due to the nature of the background system. You may pick one number and one letter, as the results will be graded separately.

Voting Closed, the winners are A and 1.

Pps. If anyone wants to provide the art for this story, send me the

picture. I'm a terrible artist.

End
file.